



## DECISION MEMO

### NEW VISION WILDERNESS OUTFITTER GUIDE PERMIT RE-ISSUANCE

U.S. Forest Service  
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest  
Medford-Park Falls Ranger District  
Taylor County, Wisconsin

Special Use Permit activities would occur along and adjacent to portions of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and associated trail heads in the Towns of Westboro, Molitor, Grover and Ford, Taylor County, Wisconsin.

#### BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR ACTION

In June of 2008, an outfitting and guide special use permit was issued to New Vision Wilderness to operate a therapeutic based outdoor rehabilitation program for youth on the Medford land base. This permit was renewed in February 2014. As a Therapeutic Outdoor Program Provider, they provide counseling for youth, part of which includes teaching them basic outdoor skills. In the past, they have also been under a volunteer agreement to assist with trail maintenance and special projects within the trail corridor.

New Vision Wilderness is a year round adventure-based wilderness therapy program formed in 2007 in Wisconsin for teenagers and families. The program runs on average 80 days in length. During this time, students participate in a personal growth program where they learn how to: create, pursue, and accomplish personal goals; develop and maintain healthy relationships with others; communicate feelings and related emotions/behaviors appropriately to peers and adults; increase self-esteem and decision making skills; utilize the forest as a tool for learning and; increase trust and respect for others and the environment. In the summer, students are hiking and camping along the trail, and in the winter are utilizing snowshoes or cross country skis for traveling along the trail.

New Vision Wilderness desires to continue operating annually on National Forest System lands in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and specifically wishes to continue to utilize the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (IAT) for hiking and camping activities due to its vicinity to their base camp of operations in Perkinstown. New Vision Wilderness is requesting to continue using the National Forest for their activities.

Based on the existing special use permit that expired on 12/31/2019, a proposal to reissue a 10 year special use permit was developed.

#### DECISION

In order for New Vision Wilderness to continue operating annually on National Forest lands in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and specifically, utilizing the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (IAT) for hiking and camping activities, my decision includes re-issuance of an outfitter/guide special use permit to New Vision Wilderness for a 10 year term. In addition to the standard special use clauses, my Decision includes special provisions (listed at the end of this section) for minimizing the potential for adverse environmental impacts.

All major roads and trailheads between Highway 13 and Highway 64 will be utilized. Activities included in this permit are camping and hiking activities along and adjacent to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail in order to learn how to:

- Plan, prepare, and participate in an intensive backpacking experience.
- Be self-reliant in the backcountry (including proper dress, gear upkeep and safety)
- Plan and prepare healthy meals.
- Utilize low-impact camping techniques.
- Better appreciate the inherent value of wild areas and solitude.
- Participate in stewardship projects such as trail construction or other projects.

An integral part of my decision are provisions identified as needed for the protection of human health and safety and other forest resources or authorized uses during the interdisciplinary analysis conducted for this project. These include:

- All New Vision Wilderness counselors will be certified Leave No Trace (LNT) Master Trainers and Wilderness First Responders.
- New Vision Wilderness would maintain individual group sizes of no more than 10 students and 3 staff.
- Primary camping areas for overnight stays will utilize existing dispersed sites adjacent to the IAT. Additional campsites may be utilized if existing, dispersed campsites are occupied or not accessible. All camping sites (existing and new) for an upcoming season would be identified by New Vision Wilderness and approved by the FS with conditions of approval documented in a yearly operating plan.
- New Vision Wilderness would provide the FS with general campsite locations & access, specific coordinates, and closest vehicle access information. Once approved, New Vision Wilderness would forward campsite information to the Taylor County Sheriff's Department and Forest Service Law Enforcement prior to the start of activities.
- Prior to primary field season use, New Vision Wilderness would conduct an initial site condition and hazard tree assessment at each approved site. New Vision Wilderness would work with Forest Service staff on the mitigation of all identified hazards and the development of an action plan for any other site condition concerns.
- There is the potential for the occurrence of Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS) animals, nesting sites, and habitat along the IAT corridor. All wood turtles should be left alone if encountered. In addition, there are known RFSS plant locations within 500 feet of the IAT. Prior to establishment of any new dispersed campsites; surveys would need to be conducted by FS personnel. In most cases, avoidance of placing camp sites adjacent to sensitive species or their habitats will be prescribed.
- The local biologist will need to know the number of hazard trees removed in order to notify the USFWS of the annual total in accordance with Final 4(d) Conservation Measures FS R9 Conservation Measures.
- Any newly developed dispersed camping sites will be a minimum of 100 feet from wetlands and 100 feet back from evidence of the high water mark of any water features.
- New Vision Wilderness uses canines as therapeutic support. Cat holes of 6-8 inches will be used to dispose of canine waste. Canine food will be hung along with group food in a tree 5

feet from the trunk and 10 feet from the ground. USFS guidelines will be followed for canine practices including leash protocols. All companion or service dogs should be on a leash and avoid camping within a half-mile of road crossings.

- Camp site establishment could have an impact on historic or archaeological sites. Heritage surveys were conducted in August 2020. If any sites are discovered during routine operations of the permit, activities will halt until an assessment (by the FS) can be made and protection measures identified.
- There is at least one known garlic mustard site (an invasive plant) along the IAT and there are a number of invasive plant infestations that are intersected by the IAT. Camp site establishment will avoid these sites.

### **REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THIS ACTION**

The Forest Service has identified typical classes of actions that normally do not require documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) per 40 CFR 1507.3 (b) (2). These types of actions are called categorical exclusions. An action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or an EA only if that action falls within one of the identified categories [36 CFR 220.6 (d) and (e)] and when there are no extraordinary circumstances [36 CFR 220.6 (b)].

This action falls within category 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(3) and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, 32.2(3) which is "Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land."

This is a category for which a project or case file and Decision Memo are required.

I also find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. In making this decision, I took into account the resource conditions identified in 36 CFR 220.6 (d):

- *Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species (RFSS)* will not be adversely affected by this action. There is the potential for Federally listed threatened or endangered species, RFSS animals, nesting sites, and habitat along the IAT corridor. In addition, there are known RFSS plant locations within 500 feet of the Ice Age Trail. Thus, prior to establishment of new dispersed campsites; surveys will need to be conducted in order to avoid any sites. (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).
- *Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds* would not be adversely affected. There are no municipal watersheds within the project area. There are no municipal watersheds on the Medford-Park Falls District. Floodplains are not expected to be impacted by camping and hiking activities. Campsites and occupants could be impacted if placed in floodplains. Wetlands and other water features could be impacted by the camping activities. For the previous stated reasons, any newly developed dispersed camping sites will be a minimum of 100 feet from wetlands and 100 feet back from evidence of the high water mark of any water features. Implementing these basic best management practices would prevent adverse impacts to watersheds. (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).

- *Congressionally* designated areas such as *Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas (Forest Plan FEIS 3-199, 3-201)* would not be adversely affected by this action. There are no congressionally designated areas on the Medford-Park Falls District (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).
- *Inventoried Roadless Areas* would not be adversely affected by this action. No Inventoried Roadless Areas are present around or adjacent to the proposal area (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).
- *Research Natural Areas or proposed areas* (Forest Plan FEIS Appendix N) would not be adversely affected by these actions. The Ice Age Trail (IAT) does intersect the Richter Lake Hemlocks and Mondeaux Hardwoods RNAs. Proposed use of the IAT is not expected to threaten or interfere with the objectives or purposes of the above RNAs (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).
- *American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites* are not expected to be affected by these actions (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist). Local and affected Indian tribes were notified about this action, and no concerns were identified.
- *Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas* would not be affected by these actions (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist). Camping can have an impact on archaeological sites, given that digging is involved for fire rings, latrines, and burying of waste at the very least. Heritage surveys were conducted in August 2020. No potential to affect historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR 800.3(a) (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).

Based upon experience with similar types of projects, these actions are considered minor in context and intensity. This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

A description of the project was posted to the Forest's public website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57631>) in September 2020 and was included in the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions in September 2020.

A comment was received asking that altering of the area from multiple campsites, cutting of trees, and leftover garbage be taken into consideration. No response was received from the commenter when contacted for further information. No other concerns or issues were identified as a result of consultation and public involvement efforts.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

**Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act):** The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (Section 6(g) (3), (e) (iv), and (f) (i)) and resulting regulations (36 CFR 219.15) require that management practices carried out on National Forest System land meet the objectives and requirements of the Forest Plan. I have reviewed the direction in the Forest Plan. Our decision addresses Forest Plan Goal 2.1 Recreation Opportunities (2004 Forest Plan, p. 1-5) "Maintain or enhance the diversity and quality of recreation experiences within acceptable limits of change to ecosystem stability and condition." This decision incorporates relevant Forest Plan standards and

guidelines. Also see the Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist for additional information on Forest Plan consistency. Following review of the relevant documents in the project file, I find my decision to be consistent with the Forest Plan.

**Clean Water Act, As Amended 1977:** The Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, as amended, is commonly referred to as the Clean Water Act. This project is consistent with this act. (Extraordinary Circumstances Checklist)

**Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, As Amended 1978, 1979, 1982, 1988 (16 U.S.C. 1531):** This Act provides direction to the Forest Service to establish objectives for habitat management and recovery through the Forest Plan for the conservation and protection of endangered and threatened species. This project is consistent with these guidelines. (Extraordinary Circumstances Checklist)

**National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470):** This Act provides direction for Federal agencies to establish a program for preservation of historic properties. In compliance with this act, potential impacts to sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places were considered in this analysis. No impacts are expected. If archaeological remains are found prior to or during operations, activities will stop immediately until evaluation and clearance are provided (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).

**Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 U.S.C. 1271-1287):** There are no rivers in the permit area that have been congressionally designated under this act (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).

**Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1131-1136):** This Act established a congressionally designated national wilderness preservation system to be composed of federally owned areas. There are no wilderness areas within or adjacent to the permit area (Extraordinary Circumstance Checklist).

## IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation may start immediately after the date of signature on this document. Implementation is considered to be the issuance of a special use permit which is required prior to any physical activities taking place.

## CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Ann Dassow, District Recreation Manager, 850 North 8<sup>th</sup>, HWY 13 Medford, WI 54451 phone 715-748-4875 ext 7484824, email at [ann.dassow@usda.gov](mailto:ann.dassow@usda.gov).

## SIGNATURE OF DECIDING OFFICER

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PAUL I. V. STRONG  
Forest Supervisor

### Attachments:

Attachment1: - Maps

Attachment 2 - New Vision Wilderness Operating Plan 2020



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